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House of Education.
Ambleside.

25.11. 1904

Sir,

I am gratified to have, on behalf of the Parents' National Educational Union, an opportunity of laying before the Consultative Committee some conclusions that have forced themselves upon me in the course of an unusual experience. They seem to me to belong to the "important issues raised" in the Proposals for a System of School Certificates you have done me the honour to forward.

These very liberal and wise proposals would appear to meet the case at every point.

A. It might be thought well to add a clause providing for an unforeseen examination, testing power rather than acquirements on some half-dozen points; such as,

(1) The scholar to name the six finest forest trees in his neighbourhood, stating where each grows and giving an estimate of girth and height,

(2) Write an essay of Lamb's, for example, once read, with some attempt to catch the style of the author,

(3) Summarise (in speech, not writing) a leader from the Times, once read, enumerating the points made by the writer,

(4) Describe a picture (from reproduction) which he has had five minutes to study; to reproduce from memory a detail of the same,

(5) Produce specimens of work in certain handicrafts,

(6) Draw a sketch map covering a radius of three miles or so from his home, showing the crops grown last year in the several fields, the directions and distance of neighbouring villages, etc.

No suggested line of work could be used for such an examination, as its usefulness would depend upon its unforeseen character, but it should test the scholar's power of writing and speaking good English off-hand, his power of attention, his accuracy and his observing power.

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B. It is open to question whether children receive an adequate and liberal education between the ages of six and twelve.

I venture to say this though recognising the remarkable devotion and ability of many of the teachers of Lower Schools.

Perhaps an Initial Examination, upon entering, - in addition to a Final, upon leaving, - a Secondary School might be made to suggest profitable lines of work to teachers of Lower Schools.

Such an examination should test, not the scholar's acquirements, but his intelligence. It might be confined to some half-dozen points, for example;-

(1) a couple of pages from one of the Waverley Novels, or Gulliver's Travels, or the like, to be read aloud to the scholars who should then narrate the incident or episode after a single hearing,

(2) a passage from a newspaper (an account of fire or show) to be read once to or by the scholars and to be reproduced by them in writing half-an-hour later,

(3) an illustration of a favourite scene from a play of Shakespeare's, or other book lately read, to be drawn in brushwork.

(4) a list (a) of the birds they have observed during the year with facts they have noticed about two of them, (b) of the hedgerow, or field, or pond, plants they have found, with brush-drawings, from memory, of two of them, to be made by the scholars,

(5) a plan, according to scale, of the room they are in, to be drawn, a pocket compass to be used in order to find direction.

(6) specimens of basket-work, cardboard sloyd, sewing, bent-iron work - their own unaided work - to be produced.

The child who can meet these or similar tests will do good work in a secondary school; and, what is of more consequence, he will have

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I have in view. The conditions of success seem to be, (1) that the education of children between six and twelve be on things and books, and (2) that oral teaching, whether by lesson or lecture, take a subordinate place in the school work.

I am, Sir,

Truly yours,

(Signed) C.M. MASON.

(On behalf of the Parents' National Educational Union.)

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House of Education.
Amherst.